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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001166

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PM/FO
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [OVIP](#) [PETRAEUS](#) [DAVID](#) [MARR](#)
UNSC, MOPS, IZ, IR, SY, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA TELLS GENERAL PETRAEUS HE WILL
VISIT IRAQ

REF: A. BEIRUT 1112
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2298

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Prime Minister Fouad Siniora announced to General David Petraeus, during the latter's August 6 visit to Lebanon, his plans to go to Iraq once parliament has passed the vote of confidence, expected to occur o/a August 12. Siniora said he intended to demonstrate to the Arab world his support for Iraq, and agreed with Petraeus on the need to bring Iraq back into the Arab fold. In the two and a half hour meeting, most of which was on Iraq, Siniora demonstrated an avid interest in the situation on the ground and Petraeus, prepared briefing materials, asking many questions.

[1](#)2. (C) Siniora raised his usual concerns -- a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, liberation of Sheba'a Farms, and implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 -- and expressed his hopes for mutually beneficial relations with Syria. He concluded that Iranian influence has gained in strength in Syria, to which Petraeus responded that Syria also needed to reunite with the Arab world. End summary.

[1](#)3. (C) In an August 6 visit to Beirut, General David Petraeus, Commanding General of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq, met for over two hours with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and his advisors Major General Eid and Rola Nourredine at the Grand Serail. Colonel Mike Bell, Director-Commander's Initiatives Group, Lieutenant Colonel Everett Spain, Aide-de-Camp, Sadi Othman, Cultural Advisor and Translator, and Major Joel Rayburn, Commander's Staff, accompanied by CDA, A/DCM, Defense Attache, Office of Defense Cooperation Chief, and PolOff also attended the meeting.

WILL GO TO IRAQ AFTER
PARLIAMENTARY VOTE

[1](#)4. (C) Prime Minister Siniora announced his plans to go to

Iraq and Egypt following parliament's vote of confidence on the cabinet statement, expected o/a August 12. Noting that he had been planning to go to Iraq for some time, Siniora stressed the important regional role Iraq historically has played in the Arab world and highlighted its potential as a trading partner for Lebanon.

15. (C) Petraeus voiced his support for such a visit, saying that while the situation has improved vastly, Iraq needed the Arab world to welcome it. He noted that Iraq faced problems similar to Lebanon, explaining that having a parliamentary majority is not enough, but that the Iraqi government needed the support of major political elements to govern effectively.

16. (C) Affirming that he understood the situation has improved through his conversations with Prime Minister Maliki, Siniora said he intended to visit Iraq in order to make a show of embracing its regional neighbor. He lamented how the Iranians have "hijacked" Arab causes and touted them as pan-regional problems as a way of legitimizing Iran's influence in the region. Iran has a strong foothold in Iraq, Siniora continued, and to break this connection, the Arab world must unite behind Iraq. "Arab states made a big mistake in forsaking Iraq," he declared.

17. (C) Agreeing, Petraeus said this is why majority leader Saad Hariri's July 17 trip (Refs A, B) to Iraq was very important. Iraq needs to be reminded of its Arab identity, Petraeus added, relaying that he has been meeting with Arab leaders to garner their support for Iraq. He noted that some

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of these leaders held a negative impression of Iraq's progress because they received faulty information from extremists or members of the opposition who do not want to give credit to Maliki. Petraeus provided Siniora with an extensive briefing on the progress to date in Iraq, to which Siniora demonstrated an avid interest, asking many questions.

18. (C) Petraeus suggested Siniora could help the Arab countries "rediscover and embrace Iraq." Noting that the UAE has started this process, Petraeus said Siniora's planned visit would encourage other Arab states. Increasingly enthused, Siniora said this was precisely his goal, and he would "preach" about the visit afterwards. He further proposed cooperative initiatives between the Lebanese and Iraqi finance and education ministries.

19. (C) Inquiring whether Iran will cooperate with the P5 1 on its nuclear program, Siniora said that while the region cannot afford nuclear proliferation, he does not oppose a state's right to a peaceful nuclear power program. Petraeus congratulated Siniora on the completion of the ministerial statement. Siniora explained how he fought for a nuanced ministerial statement implying that Hizballah's right as a resistance movement falls under the state's authority.

PALESTINIAN PROBLEM
REMAINS AT THE CENTER

110. (C) Describing how the Palestinian problem "runs deep in the consciousness of all Arabs," Siniora said that as long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unresolved, extremism will continue to flourish. He added that Israeli occupation of Sheba'a Farms provides Hizballah with a raison d'etre, and perpetuates radicalism elsewhere in Lebanon. He called for full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, noting that Israel continues to conduct overflights of Lebanese territory. Petraeus reminded Siniora of Secretary Rice's remarks on resolving Sheba'a, adding that he hoped President Sleiman's impending trip to Damascus would be a positive step.

RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AND IRANIAN INFLUENCE

¶11. (C) Commenting on how much the two states have in common and how they would benefit greatly from economic cooperation, Siniora stressed that Lebanon wants the "best of relations" with Syria and will never be "against" its neighbor, but at the same time, he continued, "Lebanon is wholeheartedly an Arab country, and an independent country." Siniora complained about Syrian influence in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon and the issue of Lebanese detainees in Syria, both of which will be addressed during Sleiman's visit to Damascus. Siniora added that there are plenty of ways Lebanon and Syria can act for their mutual benefit.

¶12. (C) Remarking that he opposes the use of fleets (referring to the presence of U.S. ships off the coast of Lebanon in February), he said the U.S. can help with "understanding and support that restrain Syrian aggressions and stop Israeli invasions." Siniora, however, also noted that although the Israelis had been planning to invade Lebanon, Iran, in one way or another, had created the 2006 war in Lebanon. After commenting on Imad Mugniyeh's and Mohammed Suleiman's mysterious assassinations in Syria this year, Siniora indicated that it was being said that Iranian influence in Syria has increased. Petraeus responded that Syrian President Bashar Asad, like Iraq, needs to rediscover his Arab roots, and Lebanon can play a pivotal role in opening its arms to replace what Iran has been doing in Syria.

¶13. (C) General Petraeus has cleared this message.

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